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ABSTRACT

In January 1991, the National School Readiness Task Force was formed to promote the national goal of assuring that all children start school ready to learn. This report presents the Task Force's considerations and recommendations based on research reviews and interviews with practitioners nationwide. Following a brief discussion of the Task Force process, Chapter I redefines the concept of school readiness to include children's physical health, self-confidence, and social competence, and presents recommendations to create "caring communities" to support parents and foster children's learning and development. Chapter II provides a rationale for change, focusing on alarming trends in child health, stress on families, and lack of programs and resources for children. Chapter III presents the Task Force's vision of comprehensive support for young children and families throughout communities, while chapter IV discusses its vision of schools that are supportive of children and families. For each vision statement, a discussion is provided of developmentally appropriate practices, parent involvement, training/development and adequate compensation for staff, and comprehensive services for children. Chapter V presents four steps to building a caring community, including: (1) community leadership and planning; (2) improved federal policies and investments; (3) improved state policies and investments; and (4) initiatives by business and voluntary agencies to influence public policy and support parent involvement. Background information on Task Force members is attached. (Contains 54 references.) (AC)

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CARING COMMUNITIES:
Supporting Young Children and Families

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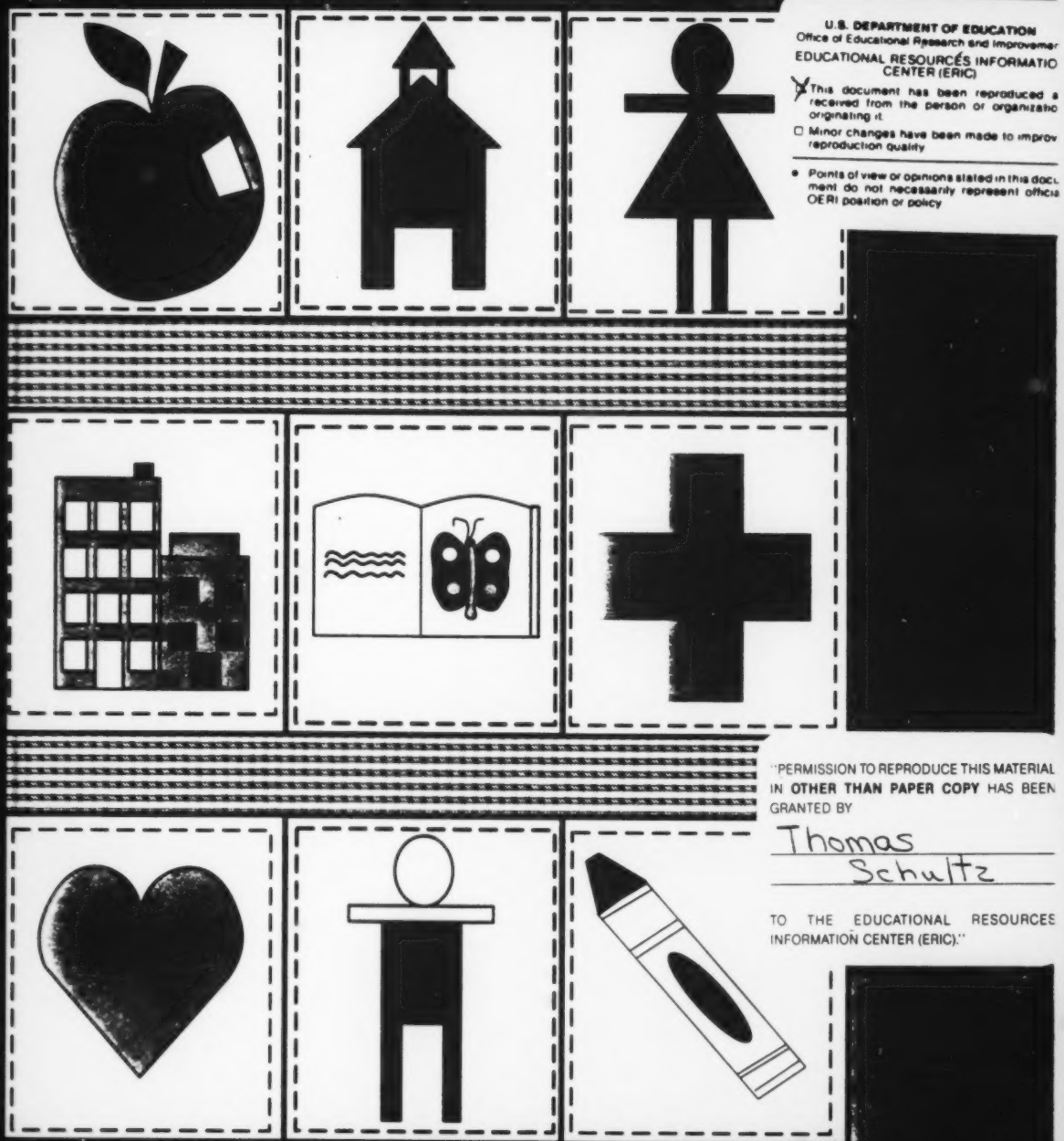

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The Report of the National Task Force on School Readiness

National Association of State Boards of Education

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CARING COMMUNITIES:
Supporting Young Children and Families

THE REPORT OF THE
NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON SCHOOL READINESS

December 1991

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THE TASK FORCE PROCESS

The National Association of State Boards of Education appointed the National School Readiness Task Force in January, 1991. The Task Force's mission is to promote the achievement of our first national education goal – to assure that all children in America start school ready to learn. The Task Force considered four key policy problems posed by the school readiness goal:

- What is "readiness"? What can families and communities do to ensure that all children come to school with these requisite characteristics?

- Which public policies and investments help parents become more competent and affirmed in nurturing and teaching their young children?

- How can we strengthen the wide range of formal and informal programs that care for young children?

- How can public schools do a better job in working with young children and their families?

Our Task Force recommendations are based on a variety of activities and resources:

- We reviewed the voluminous research on school readiness, recent policy reports on early childhood services, and a wide range of innovative state and local programs that support young children and families.

- We interviewed more than 100 early childhood and public school teachers to learn their views about children's characteristics that are most important to early school success and to identify trends in children and families in their programs.

- We asked a panel of Head Start, child care, health service, special education, and family support program experts to discuss new approaches to combining their services to achieve greater effectiveness and impact.

- We built upon NASBE's previous commitment to early childhood issues, including its earlier policy report, *Right from the Start*, and its recent national study of innovative public school kindergarten and primary grade programs.

We hope our recommendations will stimulate communities to renew and extend their commitment to support young children and families through public programs, private sector initiatives, and the personal commitments of citizens.

THE NATIONAL SCHOOL READINESS TASK FORCE

Chair, **Governor Bill Clinton**, Little Rock, Arkansas

Co-Chair, **Jim Crain**, Vice President for Public Affairs and Corporate Communications, New England Telephone, Boston, Massachusetts

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first national education goal, **"By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn,"** is a bold challenge to our personal values, our public policy, and our professional practice. We are challenged to believe that every child can be successful. We are challenged to support the preparation of every child for school. And we are challenged to bolster schools to accomodate success for every young child.

The school readiness goal reflects our increased awareness of the importance of early childhood experiences on eventual school performance – and our increased concern about the equity and quality of our present efforts to support young children and families. For example:

- More than 400,000 young children each year are exposed to health risks such as low birth weight; prenatal exposure to alcohol, drugs or smoking; lead poisoning; malnutrition; or child abuse and neglect.
- One in four children younger than 6 are growing up in families who cannot afford safe housing, adequate nutrition, health care, or quality child care.
- 25% of all 8-year-olds were at least a grade behind their peers in 1989.

The tragedy is that we know how to provide cost-effective programs to support families and prepare young children for school. However, we are not investing the resources needed to implement what works best for young children. For example:

- Only about 40% of preschool children from families with incomes of less than $30,000 were enrolled in preschool in 1991.
- Only 56% of all 3- to 5-year-olds with disabilities attended a preschool program in 1991.
- Staff turnover in urban child care centers averages 41%, due in large part to average salaries of only $5.35 per hour.
- 43% of all children in out-of-home care are not protected by state regulations due to exemptions.

We must move past debating the semantics of the education goals and past wrangling about how to monitor progress towards these objectives. It is time to focus our energy on promoting and achieving the goals. To that end, our report begins with a **redefinition of school readiness**:

- School readiness is more than academic knowledge. Readiness is based on children's physical health, self-confidence and social competence.
- School readiness is not solely based on the capacities of young children. Readiness is shaped and developed by people and environments.

- School readiness is not solely determined by the quality of early childhood programs. Readiness also depends on the expectations and capacities of elementary schools.

- School readiness is not solely the responsibility of individual parents. Communities have a stake in the healthy development of young children – and an obligation to support families.

To move towards achieving school readiness **we recommend creating caring communities** to mobilize public, private and voluntary efforts to support young children and families:

- **We recommend providing comprehensive support for young children and their families.** Communities should help parents meet their needs for health care, child care, and family support through quality public programs, enhanced initiatives by employers, and stronger informal efforts by voluntary organizations and individuals.

- **We recommend improving support for young children and families in public schools.** Elementary schools should implement "developmentally appropriate" teaching and assessment, based on our understanding of how young children learn and develop. Schools should also strengthen efforts in parent involvement and staff development and work with community agencies to provide appropriate and effective services to children and families.

In order to create caring communities, we recommend four action steps:

1. **Local leadership and planning** to develop public commitment and specific strategies to improve support for young children and families in early childhood programs and schools.

2. **Responsive federal policies and investments** to allow more local decisionmaking in the use of resources, to improve the effectiveness of program services and to help overcome extreme variations in community resources and opportunities for families and children.

3. **State government leadership** to pull together federal and state mandates and resources to create more coherent and flexible local service systems and to strengthen the competence and morale of early childhood staff members and parents of young children.

4. **Increased commitment from employers and voluntary agencies** to complement public early childhood programs and to build additional sources of support for families.

Progress towards the school readiness goal will benefit children, families, local communities and our nation. When we do the right thing in professional practice and make the moral choice to invest resources in helping young children, everybody wins. In the short run, children are happier and healthier and parents are empowered and affirmed. In the near term, children are equipped to enter schools as confident and competent students. And in the long term, society will save money on the costs of school failure and benefit from more competent workers and citizens.

INTRODUCTION

A historic strength of America is how we've come together to tackle difficult problems. It's time for communities to do this again for young children and families.
Ron Herndon

BY THE YEAR 2000, ALL CHILDREN IN AMERICA WILL START SCHOOL READY TO LEARN.

Children will receive the nutrition and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies and the number of low birth weight babies will be significantly reduced through enhanced prenatal health systems.

Every parent in America will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day helping his or her preschool child learn; parents will have access to the training and support they need.

All disadvantaged or disabled children will have access to high quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school.

President Bush and the 50 governors announced our national education goals following the 1989 Education Summit Conference at Charlottesville, Virginia. This first goal – school readiness – is strongly supported by political leaders of both parties and the general public. It reflects our increased understanding of the importance of early childhood experiences for school performance – and our increased concern about present efforts to support young children and their families.

Since the goals were promulgated, the National Education Goals Panel has worked to create a framework to measure progress on the goals. At the same time, the Department of Education's America 2000 Initiative urges states and communities to formally adopt these ambitious and crucial objectives. The National School Readiness Task Force offers this report to encourage and guide public policy and community efforts to achieve Goal #1. We begin with **a redefinition of school readiness** and an overview of our **two key recommendations to create "Caring Communities"** as the primary focus for efforts to achieve this goal.

Redefining School Readiness

We began our work with a strong awareness of problems with current school readiness practices. In many communities, readiness is measured solely in terms of specific academic skills and knowledge, and young children who "fail" these tests are discouraged from entering kindergarten or assigned to various forms of two-year kindergarten programs. These practices reflect a misguided and incomplete conception of readiness and of early childhood development (Kagan, 1990; Meisels, *et.al.*, in press). A redefinition of school readiness – based on what we **know** about how young children learn – is long overdue. After reviewing pertinent research and theory, talking with parents and teachers, and incorporating a strong dose of common sense, the Task Force concludes that school readiness has four facets: children; parents and early childhood programs; schools; and communities.

1. School readiness is far more than academic knowledge and skills. Readiness is based on children's physical health, self-confidence and social competence.

> ***Readiness is about little children with basic needs that have to be met – not just at age 5 but from birth. Children need dental care and eye exams and immunizations as well as love and nurturing. We must give kids a strong start.***
> *Terri Rosegrant*

Readiness for school requires an emerging facility to experience and shape one's environment, rather than the mastery of discrete facts and skills. Professional opinion and common sense agree that a child's readiness for school is enhanced by good physical health, ability to speak and listen, a degree of emotional stability and independence, and social skills.

Physical health is inextricably linked to children's ability to learn:

- Developmental delays, hearing or vision impairments, emotional difficulties or learning problems often result from inadequate support for health development.

- Children's ability to concentrate is diminished when they are tired, hungry, uncomfortable, under stress or bothered by the disruptive behavior of others.

- School attendance is often reduced, through absences or time required to get medical attention, when children are in poor health (Zill, 1990, p.2).

In our interviews with more than 100 Head Start, child care, and kindergarten teachers, we found that self-confidence and ability to cooperate with staff and peers are the key factors in early school success. Teachers explicitly value these traits in children far more than being able to recite the alphabet, recognize shapes, numbers and colors:

> "If children have strong self esteem, if the self-esteem is in place, the learning will come."

> "I want the child to come in with enthusiasm, just loving to be at school. I just want children to wake up first thing in the morning and say 'Is this a school day? I want to go.' I don't worry so much about the academics, yet. If I can get them in here and get them excited about school, then we've got it made."

> "The child who is ready stands tall, asks a lot of questions, is ready to answer questions, is curious, uses materials in a lot of different ways, and rarely says 'I can't do this.' "

Thus, teachers' opinions mirror the increasingly sophisticated research on the development of social competence (Hartup & Moore, 1990) and self-esteem (Curry & Johnson, 1990). Teachers are confident they can work successfully with young children who feel good about themselves, are willing to try and are able to enter into the classroom community.

2. School readiness is not determined solely by the innate abilities and capacities of young children. Readiness is shaped and developed by people and environments.

Readiness depends on the interactions of children with institutions and people. It's not solely based on what resides inside children nor can it be easily measured.
Samuel Meisels

All young children are naturally motivated to make sense of their lives and to explore their surroundings. However, what they learn varies enormously in its potential to enrich development and its contribution to the eventual demands of fitting into a kindergarten classroom. For example, if infants are left in cribs for hours without being held or changed or spoken to, they learn about their limited ability to have any effect on the world. They get the message that people don't care for them. If 4-year-olds spend hours each day repeating addition facts or tracing letter shapes, they view learning as boring, repetitive and fraught with the danger of making mistakes.

Young children may be inherently curious, but they are not in charge of their "working conditions." Young children depend on adults for nourishment, emotional support, conversation, learning materials and transportation. Getting ready for school involves helping children in the context of families and improving programs in terms of the morale and skill of their staff members. Today's young children spend their early years in a wide range of environments (Hofferth & Phillips, 1991):

- 11.9 million preschool children are cared for by parents, relatives or other caregivers in their own homes – so we must offer support, information and encouragement to and through families; but

- 6.7 million young children leave their homes for child care, nursery schools or family child care settings for all or part of every day – so we must also apply what we know about high quality early childhood programs.

3. School readiness is not solely determined by the quality of early childhood programs. Readiness also depends on the expectations and capacities of elementary schools.

> ***[T]he single most important strategy that schools can adopt in pursuit of 'readiness 2000' is the upgrading of their early childhood services by readying schools for young children....***
> *(Kagan, 1990, p.277)*

> ***School readiness must be embedded in our larger movement for education reform. Our ultimate goal is to create caring and productive adults.***
> *Patricia Hamner*

Children are legally eligible to enter public schools based on chronological age. Yet, their chances for success depend not only on their capabilities, but also on kindergarten teachers' expectations and programs. For example, teachers who expect children to sit still for long periods of time or to complete endless sets of worksheets may view the majority of 5-year-old children as unready. Or if a school district requires children to pass a test to enter kindergarten, then the test becomes the sole measure of success for 4-year-olds in the community.

School readiness also depends on the resources and supports provided to teachers. A single teacher with responsibility for 35 5-year-olds will be hard pressed to respond to children with different learning styles, diverse cultural backgrounds and languages, and varying levels of maturity. Smaller group sizes – with resources such as community volunteers, older children as tutors, computers, and strong staff development in developmentally appropriate methods – can help teachers support success in a wider range of children. The need to equip teachers to respond positively to student diversity also extends beyond the kindergarten level into the primary grades. As one kindergarten teacher told us:

> "I have taught these children to have so many choices and to speak when they have something to say. My worry is when they get to first grade the teacher will say, 'I didn't ask you what you thought or what you feel – sit down!' Have I done anything for them? Will they be crushed next year?"

4. School readiness is not solely the responsibility of individual parents. Communities have a stake in the healthy development of young children – and an obligation to support families.

The best way to get children ready for school is to have them grow up in strong families. We need to create communities that help families flourish and nurture their children.
Jack P. Shonkoff

Families are the primary agencies which prepare children for school and life. However, parents can be more successful if they are bolstered by informal and organized supports. Parents need to feel that they can meet the basic needs of their children for safety, for food, for emotional support and for health care. And parents need to feel that what they do with their children is valuable and important. The best early childhood programs work with and through parents. Rather than erode or conflict with parental responsibility, they empower and affirm families.

The national school readiness goal expresses our public interest – both altruistic and economic – in the welfare of every young child. Communities reap long-term benefits for each child who enjoys a successful start in school. Quality services that strengthen families and support early childhood development have far-reaching benefits. On the other hand, families and children who do not receive timely and quality help often require more costly services in future years. For example, we can choose to spend:

$1 on childhood immunizations	OR	$10 in later medical costs
$1 on comprehensive prenatal care for women through Medicaid	OR	$3.38 in later health costs
$1 for quality preschool education	OR	$4.75 for later special education, crime, welfare, and other costs
$850 for one year of compensatory education	OR	$4,000 for the cost of a single repeated grade
$4,500 per family for family preservation services	OR	$10,000 for one year of foster care for one child

Adapted from Children's Defense Fund. (1991)
The State of America's Children, p.6.

Promoting School Readiness through Caring Communities

A caring community works together to support children and families so that children can enter schools ready to progress.
Heather Weiss

Assuring readiness is a process of people working together, with the family at the center.
Barbara Ferguson Kamara

The 1980s was a decade of activism in state education reform and early childhood initiatives. Then a new strategy of national education goals ushered in the 1990s. However, recent policy efforts have taught us that local effort and circumstances are pivotal in spurring true reform in social conditions or public schools.

Our national education goals offer much promise, but their realization depends on community initiative for three reasons:

- **Families live and children grow up in communities.** Young children are raised in homes and neighborhoods that either threaten or support their health and confidence. Young children are vulnerable to physical risks in the environment – or they can enjoy safe playgrounds, supportive neighbors and healthy surroundings.

- **Programs are implemented in communities.** State and federal initiatives are fleshed out or thwarted by local action and circumstance. Local professionals interpret legislative intentions through their daily interactions with children and parents. States and the federal government set the stage and write the script from a distance – but local actors perform the play.

- **Community leaders are close to the problems of young children and families** and best able to gauge the value of new early childhood initiatives. Local government officials and program managers know the people, remember the history of past efforts and are skilled at wedding public agencies, private and sectarian organizations and voluntary institutions.

"Caring Communities" are a historical strength of America:

- Caring Communities are created by personal commitment to collective action.

- Caring Communities are motivated by a sense of mutual obligation and a recognition that individuals benefit from investing in better futures for children and families.

- Caring Communities bring people together to develop a common vision of problems and solutions.

Caring Communities, therefore, are the primary force in assuring that families are supported in their efforts to foster children's learning and development. The Task Force offers two fundamental recommendations to define how Caring Communities should work to promote school readiness:

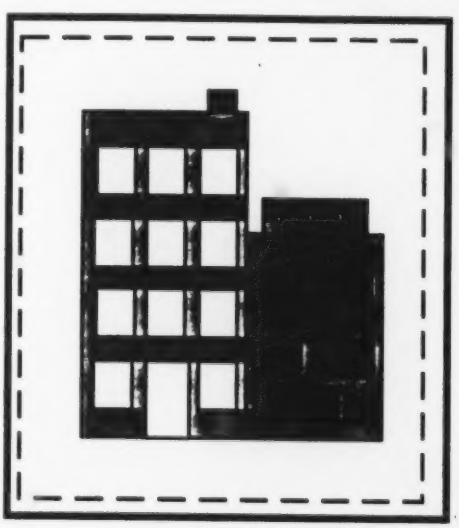
Recommendation #1. Caring Communities provide comprehensive support for young children ages 0 - 4 and their families.

Caring communities strengthen informal supports and develop quality programs for children and families. These programs fill gaps in health, family support, child care and related human services. Programs strive to link services for more continuous and convenient help to families.

Recommendation #2. Caring Communities improve support for young children and families in public school.

Elementary schools implement "developmentally appropriate" teaching and assessment practices, strengthen efforts in parent involvement and professional development for staff, and work with community agencies to provide appropriate and effective services to children and families.

Any plans to achieve readiness must deal with the real conditions that mold America's young lives and minds. The school readiness strategies outlined here address the environments and people that influence children's well-being and competence. School readiness hinges on what it is like to grow up in America, in families, neighborhoods, child care and Head Start programs and in public and private schools. Threats to children's safety and health must be eliminated. Children's emotional and social development must be promoted in families and supportive early childhood programs. Moreover, schools must get themselves "ready" for young children. Thus, no single "silver bullet" program can be created to guarantee school success for all children. We need to support and strengthen all the major settings where children live and learn – families, neighborhoods, community-based programs, and schools.



CHAPTER II

RATIONALE FOR CHANGE

One of the first things we learned when we all went to education school twenty years ago – to work with the whole child. I don't know how we got away from that. But we have. Once we start meeting the needs of the whole child again, we'll begin to see real academic improvement.... We need to attach more social workers to the school who can go into the home and provide more services directly to children and families, taking care of bad teeth and nutrition and abuse. We've got to do this now, in the preschools and the elementary schools – and, in fact, before the child is born, with good prenatal care for mothers. We can't do it later. There's no way.

Sheila Mae Bender, early childhood teacher (Louv, 1990, p. 343)

Most children come to school ready to learn. Children have, after all, been busily learning since they were born! Most children receive adequate health care, live in supportive families and have varied experiences that promote their development. Yet increasing numbers of children have experiences before entering kindergarten that threaten their well-being and future success. At the same time, schools are too often ill prepared to respond to the diverse developmental needs of young children or their families. Therefore the Task Force calls for community action to promote school readiness in two key areas:

- Develop comprehensive services for children and families from the prenatal period to school entry.

- Improve support and education for young children and families through their schools.

This chapter will highlight the evidence and deliberations that led to these recommendations.

The Need for Comprehensive Support for Young Children and Families

How are children faring before they reach the school door? Do they live in healthy environments? Do families have access to the services that bolster success in raising children? Are services organized in ways that respond to the diverse needs of children and families? The responses to these questions provide the rationale for our recommendations. The Task Force proposal for comprehensive early childhood and family support services is based on two serious problems:

- All too often young children and families live in conditions that are not conducive to optimal development. Alarming trends include increases in child poverty, insufficient health care, and family stress.

- Even when early childhood, health and family support services exist, they are not always affordable, services are fragmented and inaccessible, and many programs lack the resources to support qualified staff and to provide effective, quality services.

In the U.S., nearly all infants are born in hospitals and all births are registered with official agencies when birth certificates are filed. Five years later, nearly all children register for enrollment in public schools. In between these two mooring points, many children are at sea... The 1-4 year age group represents the nation's biggest hiatus in societal oversight for the well-being of children.
(Williams & Miller, 1991, p.5)

1. Alarming trends in child health.

The national readiness goal recognizes that good health promotes learning. Conversely, poor health, disease or injury before school entry can cause developmental delays, hearing or vision losses, speech impediments or learning disabilities that affect children's ability to perceive, reason or remember. Once in school, poor health may lead to frequent absences, reduced efficiency in performance and disruptive behavior (Zill, 1990). These serious threats to child health are cause for grave concern:

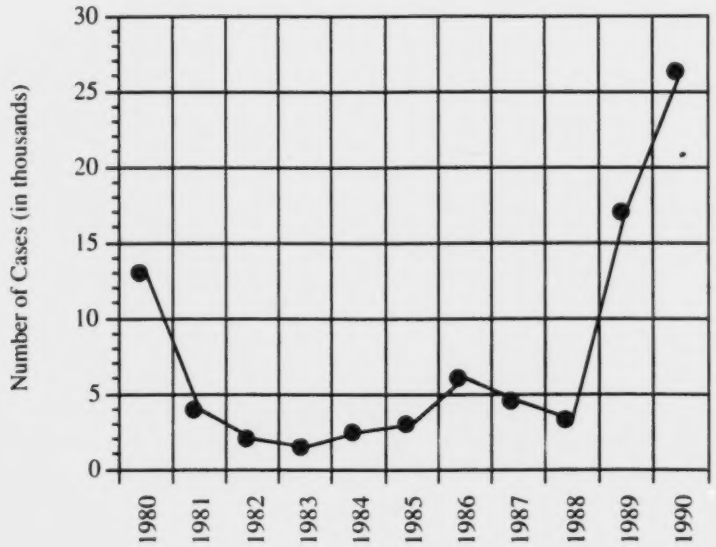
- More than 400,000 children each year are exposed to potential damage, may experience a significant degree of learning impairment, and may be unable to learn as well as their natural endowment would allow. Health risks include low birth weight; prenatal exposure to alcohol, tobacco, or drugs; lead poisoning; child abuse and neglect; and malnutrition (Newman & Buka, 1991).

- One in four children younger than six are growing up in families who cannot afford to purchase the goods and services they need to maintain their health and live in areas where they are exposed to environmental pollutants or risks of injury (Klerman, 1990). Many children, particularly those from low-income families, do not receive regular preventive care or timely acute care when problems arise (National Commission on Children, 1991).

- An estimated one-third of all mothers receive inadequate prenatal care. Even those with insurance coverage may not obtain services due to problems with child care and transportation, lack of awareness of the importance of prenatal care, or inability to find an appropriate provider (Pepper Commission, 1990).

Reported Measles Cases 1980-1990

The increase in unvaccinated persons with measles reported for 1989 primarily reflected the increasing number of cases reported among unvaccinated inner-city preschool-aged children.
(Klerman, 1990, p. 33)



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control. (1990). *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 39* (53).

2. Stress on family life.

Between 1973 and 1986...the median income of young American families with children headed by persons under age thirty fell by 26% – a decrease virtually identical to the per capita income loss of 27% which Americans suffered between 1929 and 1933....The median earnings of family heads under age twenty-five with children plunged by 60%, so that by 1986 more than half of all children living in such families were poor.
(Louv, 1990, p. 48)

Healthy children can only grow and thrive if they are rooted in a strong family. Children require what Urie Bronfenbrenner (1991) calls a strong, mutual and irrational emotional attachment to someone who is committed to their well-being and development, preferably for life. Research reinforces the recognition that the family serves as the linch-pin for human development, and that factors outside the family affect its capacity to nurture and rear children (McLoyd, 1990).

Within the family, children feel secure and cared for or neglected and forgotten; they grow to be autonomous and self-confident or frightened and insecure. Some families today are robust and healthy. Other families, in increasing numbers, are isolated and alone, struggling and stressed:

- Compared to 25 years ago, not only has proximity and connection to a kinship group decreased, but there has been a break up of the nuclear family, with more unwed mothers and more marriages ending in divorce.

- Poverty and family structure go hand and hand. Nearly two-thirds of all children younger than 6 who live in families headed by women have low incomes (Johnson, *et. al., 1991*).

- Nearly 100,000 preschool children live away from their natural families due to abuse or neglect; many others live with families who are homeless (APWA, 1990 and U.S. Congress, 1989).

- Most American families now have a mother in the workforce. When a single parent or both parents work, added demands face the family. For many, there is simply not enough time in the day to get everything done. Work hours compete with childrearing. Child care arrangements that break down too often cause continued stress in an already harried day.

Parents interviewed by the Families and Work Institute (1991) put it this way:

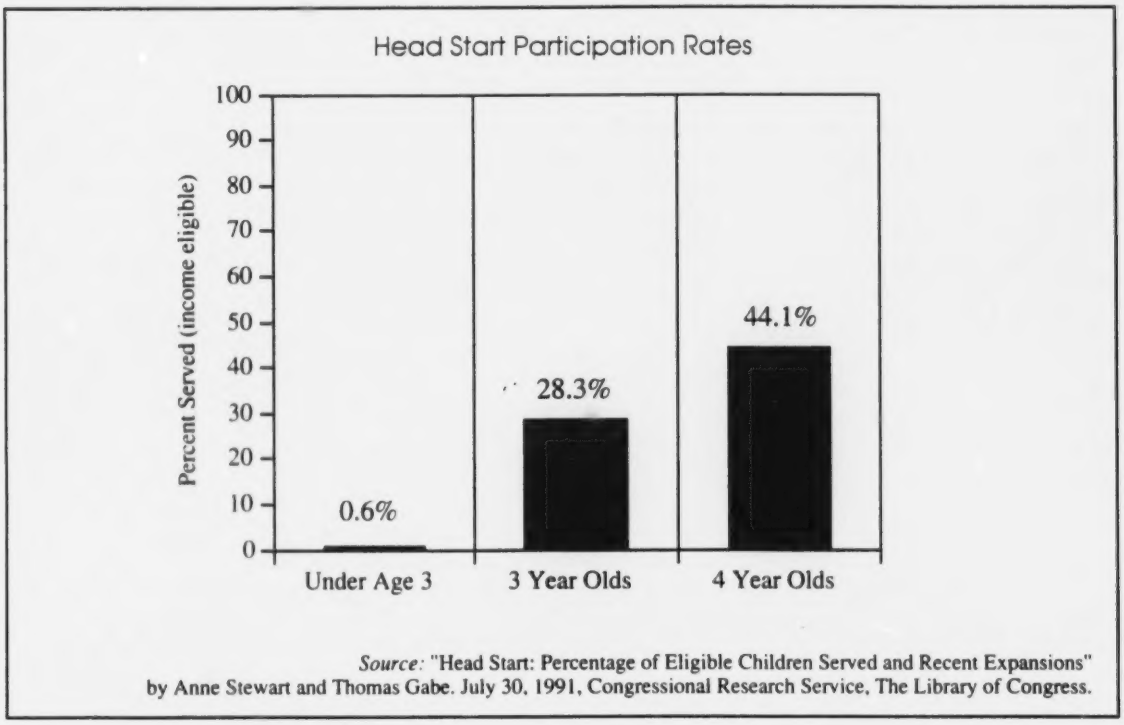
> "I think I would feel much less stress about giving birth shortly if I could be guaranteed a place at the day care center. Since I must work, finding acceptable child care is a major concern of mine."

> "I 'd like to see a flexible program that allows additional time added to a work day so that the work week could be shortened by a day. That would give me some more time to spend dealing with school problems. As it is now, the work day exceeds school hours and I feel like I am missing out on quality time in my children's lives. Most of our activities have to be squeezed in between 5:00 and 7:00."

3. Lack of high quality, comprehensive services for children.

Many American children today participate in some form of early childhood program prior to formal school entry. Programs for children from birth through age 5 come in many forms. They may be part- or full-day, center-based or home-based, public or private, profit or nonprofit. All these services have grown in response to both the needs of working parents for full-day child care and the demonstrated benefits of comprehensive early intervention. Increasing numbers of children are cared for by non-relatives while parents work; preschool enrollment of children of non-employed mothers has also risen.

Despite the rapid growth in programs, there is general consensus that there is a lack of high quality, comprehensive early childhood services. The National Education Goals Panel (1991) reports that less than half of the children aged 3 to 5 from families with incomes below $10,000 attend preschool, while 75% of children in this age group whose parents earn more than $75,000 are enrolled in these programs. Head Start reaches nearly 500,000 children aged 3 to 5, yet the program still serves less than one in three eligible children. Although 35 states now offer some form of early childhood program for 3- and 4-year-old at-risk children, few of these programs offer Head Start's comprehensive services (National Commission on Children, 1991).



Source: "Head Start: Percentage of Eligible Children Served and Recent Expansions" by Anne Stewart and Thomas Gabe. July 30, 1991, Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress.

Although the number of full-day early childhood programs has increased dramatically, quality programs often remain unaffordable for low-income working families. Families with infants and toddlers or children with special needs experience particular difficulty in locating services.

4. Program quality threatened by lack of resources and standards.

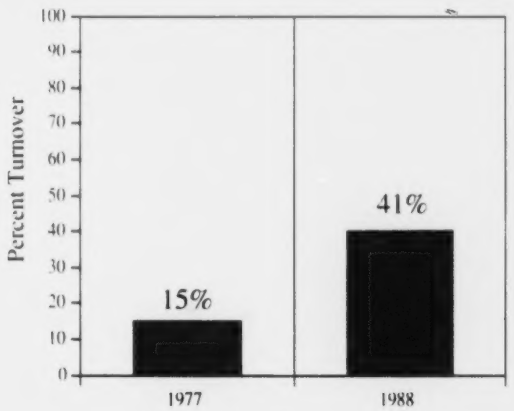
How can we expect to intervene successfully at age 4 when a sizable number of infants and toddlers have spent three years in poor quality settings?
Ellen Galinsky

The well-documented short- and long-term benefits possible in early childhood programs only result from good programs that address the comprehensive needs of children and families. Poor quality programs can impede future school success; they can threaten children's development, especially children from low-income and minority families (National Research Council, 1990). The Task Force is especially concerned about three factors that threaten the quality of early childhood programs:

- **Insufficient resources result in severe shortages of both qualified staff and appropriate training opportunities.** The National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989) concludes that the quality of center-based child care in this country is barely adequate. Because child care work is poorly compensated and undervalued, it is often difficult to recruit and retain qualified child care providers. Furthermore, good training is rarely available or affordable and most programs and communities do not promote a cohesive career development system.

This same study reports that child care center teaching staff earn an average of $5.35 per hour and staff turnover averages 41%. Young children need stable and consistent relationships with caregivers in order to feel safe and secure. Turnover can negatively affect children's ability to learn and their future success in school. Although turnover in Head Start is not as high as in the general child care community (Collins, 1990), the National Head Start Association also finds that low salaries threaten overall quality; Head Start programs often cannot recruit staff, lose qualified staff, and staff members often suffer from low morale (National Head Start Association, 1990). In a time of tremendous expansion across all programs, the staffing crisis continues to seriously undermine the quality of early childhood programs.

Comparative staff turnover rates



Early childhood programs depend on the quality and morale of their staffs. We must address the fact that many staff members are demoralized – they don't feel that people respect the importance of their work. It's very hard to retain talented people in early childhood careers.
Jack P. Shonkhoff

Source: Whitebook, M., Howes, C., & Phillips, D. (1989). *Who cares? Child care teachers and the quality of care in America.* Oakland, CA: Child Care Employee Project.

■ **The quality of early childhood programs is further threatened by inadequate child care standards.** Although states are responsible for safeguarding the quality of services in early childhood programs, the Children's Defense Fund (Adams, 1990) found that 43% of all children in out-of-home care are unprotected by state regulations due to exemptions. Where standards do apply, they often fail to require preservice or inservice training; allow staff-child ratios and group sizes that make it difficult to provide individualized and responsive care; and may not even guarantee parental access to child care programs or require immunizations for children. Other recent research shows center-based program quality threatened by increases in group size and child-to-staff ratios since the 1970s (Kisker, *et. al.*, 1991).

■ **Parents find it difficult to obtain information on how to locate and select high quality child care.** Child care resource and referral (R & R) services have sprung up across the country in the past decade. These agencies provide a wealth of consumer information to parents, technical support to the child care community and assistance to policymakers. But too often R & Rs are underfunded or not available in every community, making it more difficult for parents to find child care that meets their needs.

5. Fragmented service delivery and planning.

Current public policies undermine the development of a more cohesive early childhood and family support system. At the federal level alone, over $10 billion in 27 separate programs support early childhood activities (Sugarman, 1991). Early childhood programs may be funded through the Department of Education via Chapter 1, Even Start, and P.L. 99-457, as well as from the Department of Health and Human Services through Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant Program, the Social Service Block Grant Program, and a number of work-related child care programs. Parents also receive support from the Internal Revenue Service via the child care tax credit. This proliferation of programs is mirrored and extended at the state level, resulting in a variety of serious problems for local government, for program providers, and most seriously for families and children. For example:

- Conflicting eligibility and funding requirements lead to discontinuity for children and confusion for parents. Frequently, if families make economic progress, their children become ineligible for child care programs targeted for low-income families.

- Program and fiscal policies often make it difficult for communities to develop quality services. Standards vary depending on the source of funding; reimbursement rates rarely support the real cost of quality care.

- Program structures often prevent linkage of family support and health services with early childhood programs. Parents are required to locate and establish eligibility with several different agencies in order to obtain services. Programs may duplicate recruitment and needs assessment efforts.

- Funding and program priorities are set at the state and federal levels – far from local communities and neighborhoods where needs and services may vary. For example, expansions of Head Start and state prekindergarten programs increase part-day services for 3- and 4-year-old children. However, in many communities the greatest needs are for full-day child care and services for infants and toddlers.

Together, these problems create serious gaps in the quality and availability of early childhood services in many parts of the country. Young children, caught in the web of conflicting policies and uncoordinated services, cannot be adequately nurtured in ways that lead to success in school and in life.

The Need to Improve School Support for Young Children and Families.

Do kindergarten and primary grade programs offer young children maximum opportunities for success? What can we glean about quality from our knowledge about how schools are organized, how teachers interact with students, materials and activities, and how parents are involved and supported? Are current practices responsive to diverse rates of maturation and learning, cultural and linguistic variation, and different learning styles?

Our Task Force proposals for school improvement are based on two serious problems facing children in the early years of elementary education: inappropriate assessment and teaching practices, and the lack of comprehensive services for children and families.

1. Inappropriate assessment and teaching practices.

In recent years the early childhood field has made substantial progress in defining developmentally appropriate teaching practices and outlining more appropriate assessment strategies (NAECSSDE, 1987; NAEYC, 1990; Gnezda, *et. al.*, 1991). However, far too many public and private schools still exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- Inappropriate, inaccurate tests are frequently used with young children, often in conjunction with important decisions such as kindergarten entry or promotion, or referral to special programs and services (Meisels, *et. al.*, in press). Substantial numbers of children fail kindergarten despite research showing that children who are retained do not learn more nor become more successful than similar children who are promoted to the next grade. Many school systems continue retention practices at substantial fiscal cost, and with notable risks for students (Smith & Shepard, 1987).

- Teaching techniques are outmoded. Students often have limited opportunity to choose, read or discuss books; write; do science experiments or take field trips; solve real mathematics problems; or discuss and work in groups with other children.

- Instead, most classroom time is devoted to teachers directing whole-class and individual work on discrete facts or skills. Students in primary grade classes may complete more than 1,000 workbook pages and worksheets in a year (Jachym, *et. al.*, 1989). At least one-third of a sample of California kindergarten teachers report using worksheets or workbooks daily in reading and mathematics instruction. In contrast, less than one-half offered students painting, dramatic play, cooking or science activities more than once a week (Smith, 1987). A study of 100 kindergarten classrooms in North Carolina found that 60% of the settings fell well below standards of age-appropriate instruction and materials (Bryant, Clifford & Peisner, 1989).

- Students who need extra help have few options. Compensatory education services tend to identify children based on standardized achievement test scores. Services are provided in small groups outside the regular classroom setting, with a focus on basic skills in mathematics and reading. Many observers worry that the pace and content of this instruction emphasize drill on very specific fragments of content or skills, at a pace which fails to offer potential for students to accelerate their progress (Levin, 1987; Knapp & Shields, 1990; Means & Knapp,1991; NAECSSDE, 1991).

- Minority students and children who speak languages other than English are placed at great risk. They are often forced to adapt to practices that do not demonstrate respect for cultural or linguistic diversity.

Thus, for many children current classroom practices create a worst-case scenario. Drill-and-practice pedagogy offers low involvement and limits children to one ineffective mode of absorbing information. These barren and inflexible classrooms are understandably fraught with children who don't seem motivated or well-behaved. When students fall behind the grade's expected rate of progress, opportunities to succeed in school are even more limited.

These unstimulating practices influence children's attitudes about learning. If early reading is reduced to mastery of worksheets and phonics exercises, children fail to understand the power of reading to inform and to entertain. If writing is limited to tracing letters and learning punctuation rules, students miss its potential for expression and communication. If mathematics is limited to getting the right answer as quickly as possible, students fail to appreciate the value of alternative strategies to solve real-world problems. Similarly, the early school years set students' expectations about relationships in classrooms. Too many children learn to regard peers as sources of competition and teachers as the sole source of authority and assessment. These attitudes are a tremendous barrier to efforts to turn students into independent learners, creative thinkers, and cooperative workers.

2. Failure to respond to the comprehensive needs of children and families.

All public schools should have an outreach arm – not to duplicate services, but to pull them in. They should see that their students are receiving the services they need.
Terri Rosegrant

We see two major concerns regarding the schools' ability to involve families in their children's education and to respond to their comprehensive needs. First, despite substantial research showing that children fare better in schools when their parents are involved, most schools continue only grudging, minimal approaches to communication and interaction with parents (Epstein, 1983). The potential for active family involvement is still largely ignored, due to lack of adequate time and training of teachers and administrators and a predominant institutional culture in the schools that places little value on the views and participation of parents.

Second, although the comprehensive needs of children and families do not end as children enter school, historically schools have not seen themselves as part of a community infrastructure to support families. Few schools have taken active steps to address the health, nutrition and emotional needs of children or to help families with problems such as child care. School administrators argue that they have neither the funding nor staff expertise necessary to expand beyond academic training of children.

Schools are a natural gathering place and contact point for children and families. School facilities are valuable resources that should be accesssible to other community agencies. As such, they provide an ideal conduit to ensure that children receive adequate health and nutritional services and that parents receive the support they need to work effectively with their children. New family support programs, particularly child care and peer support, should become an integral part of school services. In addition, new collaborative relationships with community agencies should provide for more extended family support services such as housing, employment preparation and adult literacy efforts.

A VISION OF COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Society pays many penalties if we don't provide good early childhood services.
Jim Crain

We envision communities with convenient, affordable and effective services that help build strong families and provide appropriate environments for young children prenatally and through their early school years. Four characteristics form the foundation of this vision:

- Integrated and comprehensive services
- Developmentally appropriate practice
- Parent involvement and family-focused policies and services
- Well-trained and adequately compensated staff

1. Integrated and comprehensive services

We must see children as part of families. We won't help children if we take money away from health and housing programs in order to expand early childhood education.
Delia Pompa

Services should be conveniently located, promote continuity and respond to the comprehensive needs of both children and families. All families with young children can use some assistance, such as help in locating and evaluating child care and peer support from other parents. Other families need a wider range of support in order to do a good job in raising their children. In some instances, intensive sustained services may be required simply to preserve a family unit. Thus, a community support system should allow families to choose the services they need, with minimal bureaucratic costs and requirements. The service system should include:

- **Maternal and child health and nutrition services,** including prenatal and postnatal services and counseling; immunizations; early and periodic screening, referral and follow-up for all health needs; adequate meals for children; nutrition counseling for families, and access to a consistent "medical home" for regular health care.

- **Family support services,** including family-centered parent education and support; crisis intervention; adult literacy instruction; family counseling and assistance; social activities that promote family togetherness; and referrals to appropriate agencies for housing and employment needs.

■ **Developmental services for children** including developmentally appropriate full-day and half-day programs in centers, family child care homes, home visit or family support programs; before- and after-school child care; screening and assessment to identify children with potential special needs and referrals to appropriate programs.

A range of funding sources, including public and private agencies and affordable parent fees, are a part of this vision as well. This move toward comprehensive services could be accomplished in at least three ways: through a **single agency** with varied sources of funding; through **linkages among agencies and organizations** (locating services in one place or merging funds from different sources); and through **community-wide collaboration** to plan and implement services.

SINGLE AGENCY. Comprehensive services might grow from an existing early childhood program (child care, Head Start Program, or family child care system), a family support network, or through the health care system.

Early Education and Family Support Program
Windham County, Vermont

Alarmed at the increase in children with test scores below the national average, the Town of Brattleboro and the school department decided to explore family-oriented early parenting programs. They researched various school-based models and decided to implement a modification of Missouri's Parents As Teachers program. The town board voted to provide $50,000 to begin this program, which has subsequently grown into a more comprehensive and continuous family support program. The program has won a Comprehensive Child Development Program grant, federal Even Start and Follow-Through grants, and Vermont Parent Child Center funds.Together, these programs provide family literacy and parent education; comprehensive social, educational, health, child care and employment services; and individualized intervention services such as substance abuse services and child care support for teen parents.

Child Development, Inc., Russellville, Arkansas

Child Development, Inc. provides a broad array of child and family services to children from six weeks to school age and families in eleven counties in Arkansas. The organization manages twenty child care centers (funded through Head Start, parental fees and a variety of child care programs). The agency also provides parent training through HIPPY (Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters) and offers before- and after-school child care. In conjunction with local school systems, Child Development, Inc. received an Even Start grant to provide family literacy programming and state funds to deliver additional preschool services. The Sarah Lee Corporation, a major employer in the area, donated land to build a new facility and the city of Clarksville installed utilities at no charge.

Linkages. Comprehensive services can also be provided through linkages among agencies and organizations, as exemplified by these groups:

- The Parent Services Project in Fairfax, California, delivers parent support and education services to low-income families through community child care centers, family child care homes, public school and Head Start early childhood programs. The project provides supports to parents by transforming child care centers into family service centers. The Project includes initiatives in California, Florida, and Georgia.

- The Early Childhood Health/Education Outreach program in Freemont County, Colorado, integrates a variety of health, education and family support services in the community. Developmental screening is available county-wide for children from birth through school age and takes place in the courthouse, child care centers, and neighborhood homes. At the time of screening, families are given information on how to contact other community services such as prenatal care, immunization, and education programs for teen mothers.

Collaboration. Finally, a more community-wide collaborative approach that brings together a number of community interests can be used to ensure comprehensive services. Such collaborations may result in increased funding and better linkages among agencies. Collaborative efforts can include government and private agencies. For example, the Preschool Interagency Council in Gainesville, Florida, was established to provide a vehicle for implementing comprehensive services for preschool children in Alachua County. The county school board helped plan this effort, involving a wide range of health, social service, and early childhood organizations as well as parent and advocacy groups. Council initiatives are improving the quality of services, minimizing inefficiencies, and forging new alliances among providers.

Children's Board of Hillsborough County, Florida

Hillsborough County voted to tax itself for children's services in the late 1980s and created the Children's Board as a planning and funding entity. The Board works with a broad array of community groups, including the school system, to develop more integrated, cooperative service delivery in communities. They are helping to build this comprehensive plan through planning and data collection, as well as through funding in target areas of need. The Board's strategic funding plan includes priority areas such as child care, assisting families with special needs, prevention of family violence and child abuse, maternal and other preventive health care, and substance abuse treatment and prevention. The Board also offers incentives for programs to work together on joint initiatives.

2. Developmentally appropriate practice

We are convinced that all early childhood providers, including family child care homes, full day and half day centers, and public schools, should apply the principles of developmentally appropriate practice in their work with young children. In such a program, play is seen as a primary vehicle for learning, activities are planned based on the age of children, and teachers attend to the different needs, interests, and developmental levels of individual children (Bredekamp, 1987).

Developmentally appropriate practice recognizes that a strong self-concept is the key to future success (Curry & Johnson, 1990). Therefore, adults create and build upon countless daily opportunities that enable children to be capable, curious learners. Children's self-control is gradually enhanced through positive guidance that enables them to learn how to solve their own problems.

In a developmentally appropriate setting, children interact with caring and supportive adults in an atmosphere that promotes curiosity. Adults working with infants have frequent eye contact with babies; use pleasant and soothing voices; respond quickly to signs of distress; carry children frequently to provide a wide variety of experiences; and use daily routines as opportunities to play and talk together. At a minimum, they make sure that the environment is safe and secure; they protect children from communicable diseases; they respond to infants' needs for food and comfort and adjust to babies' feeding and sleeping schedules.

As children become toddlers and preschoolers, they are given ample opportunities to explore the world around them, to practice new skills and to experience autonomy and success. Providers who care for toddlers show patience and understanding of children's learning through self-initiatied activities, their experiments in getting along with other children, their demands to do things in a particular way, and their need at times to return to the comfort of familiar objects and people. Adults who work with preschool children continue these supportive interactions and extend children's play to new materials and activities. Early childhood staff use cooking, dramatic play, art, music, nature and outdoor play to provide a rich and stimulating environment.

Adults also spend time reading to children and exploring books, and writing down children's ideas and stories. These activities lay the foundation for future success in reading, mathematics and a host of other areas of learning.

Respecting the values, culture and language of the family is critical to the development of good mental health and success in school. Teachers encourage the continuation of the culture and language of the home, while providing skills and concepts that will allow the child to succeed in the larger world. Positive acknowledgement of the home culture can be achieved through the use of materials and activities that reflect the family's culture and language. However, cultural responsiveness is much, much more than a collection of artifacts, ethnic meals and holiday celebrations. Planning for diversity calls for providers to learn more about the cultural styles of the children they work with; it calls for staff who are willing to confront and question their own response to diversity and the effect this may have on children and parents (Phillips,1988).

3. Parent involvement and family-focused policies and services

Government is a big employer at all levels. Public agencies should be helping employees obtain child care and grant time off for staff to serve as mentors and volunteers.
Betty Castor

Good early childhood programs recognize and support the role of parents in the lives of young children. They use what Weissbourd and Powell (1990) call "family friendly" criteria in planning their structure, services, and staffing. The Task Force envisions the following specific forms of service to parents:

- **Parent involvement in developmental programs for children.** We see the relationship between the parent and early childhood staff as critical to the successful nurturance of young children, particularly infants and toddlers. We see parents spending more time finding out what is going on with their children during the day; staff members welcoming parent visits to programs and consistent efforts by providers to inform families about their children's progress. Families are also involved as program volunteers, and in decision making about program policies and directions.

- **Family support programs.** We also envision a network of voluntary and convenient community-based family support programs throughout the country. As described by Weiss and Halpern (1991), such programs can provide sustained social supports including information, guidance, feedback, practical information and emotional support to parents. They focus both on enhancing parenting and attending to the forces that impinge on parenting. Such programs provide a secure, accepting climate in which young parents can explore childrearing goals, beliefs and concerns. They promote and strengthen informal ties among young families in a neighborhood, advocate on behalf of better services, and reach out to families who are unwilling or unable to seek support.

Together for Children, sponsored by the Oregon State Department of Education and Central Oregon Community College, works with families with children ages 0-3 years old. The programs foster parenting skills through a combination of monthly home visits, peer support groups for parents, and play groups for children. Group meetings include presentations on topics suggested by parents, discussions among parents with children of similar ages, and time for socializing. Home visits include observations of children, sharing materials and toys, and discussions about parents' questions and problems. Services are delivered at elementary schools, Head Start and preschool centers, churches, and homes. (Adapted from Weiss, *et al.*, in press.)

■ **Assistance in locating and selecting early childhood and family support programs.** A diverse service delivery system depends on adequate resources and informed consumers to ensure that children receive safe and healthy care. We envision a network of child care resource and referral agencies that provide parent counseling on how to choose quality child care and how to monitor the care selected. In addition, such agencies document parent needs, provide training and technical assistance to providers, develop the supply of early childhood services and promote public/private partnerships and linkages among agencies. For example:

California's network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies provides a wide variety of services including child care counseling to low-income parents in training or employment programs.

The Dayton Hudson Corporation is working to build the supply of quality child care in more than 30 communities. In partnership with four national organizations, they are launching a public awareness campaign to help parents become better informed about quality child care.

■ **Support for parents from employers.** We envision employers providing more support to parents in a variety of ways, for example:

The IBM Corporation introduced a flextime pilot program at two sites in 1989, providing employees with a 2-hour window of flexible time at lunch. In another location, IBM offers convenience services such as dry cleaning, shoe repair and take-home foods to employees.

Bruce Industries, Nevada's largest rural manufacturer, began a pilot program offering work hours that match local school schedules, including 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily schedules and time-off options during school holidays and vacations.

Kid-to-Go, co-sponsored by John Hancock and a local social service agency, provides supervised field trips and activities for children during vacation periods when their parents must work (Galinsky, 1991).

■ **Voluntary initiatives to strengthen families.** We envision community foundations, voluntary and neighborhood organizations creating new efforts to help families:

Young Children: Priority One, Kiwanis International

In 1990, Kiwanis International launched a three-year initiative focused on the needs of children prenatal through age five. Local Kiwanis Clubs are sponsoring a wide variety of collaborative projects. For example, Alabama Kiwanis Clubs have launched a Reading Is Fundamental Program for all 11,000 Head Start children in the state, involving nearly 1,500 Kiwanians, their spouses, Alabama Power Service Organization employees and other volunteers (*NHSA Journal*, 1991).

Adopt-A-Family, Washington, D.C.

The Lincoln Congregational Temple, United Church of Christ in Washington, D.C. created the Adopt-A-Family Program to help strengthen and promote economic self-sufficiency of families in their community. Volunteer individuals or families build a mentor relationship with the "adopted" families for a period of at least one year. Volunteers are asked to commit time to being trained and to offer 8 hours per month in personal support and telephone contact with families. One family helped the mother of four children to complete a residential drug-treatment program and to participate in family counseling sessions. She is presently drug-free and employed. Another single mother, who was living in a homeless shelter with her three children, earned her GED, became employed and enrolled in college.

4. **Well-trained and adequately compensated staff**

We envision a system where early childhood and family support providers feel that parents and the general public value their work. We encourage talented people to enter the field, often to serve the communities in which they live. However, a career path that provides financial support for appropriate training, and compensation for increased competence and responsibilities is essential. Through financial and regulatory incentives, as well as public awareness, we can attract and retain the most caring and creative people in the country.

In good programs, staff turnover is low and staff members are dedicated to the program, to the other staff and to the children and families they serve. There is a sense of collegiality and support that provides an atmosphere for staff to express their opinions and participate in decision making. A substantial portion of

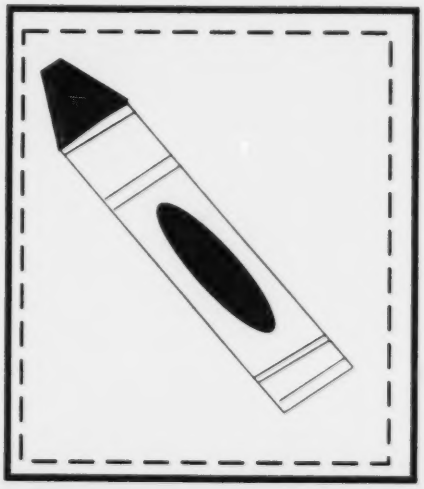
the program's budget is dedicated to salary and benefits, including ample opportunities for professional growth, adequate leave, health and retirement, substitutes, an appropriate work environment, and opportunities and incentives to move up a career ladder.

A basic level of training, such as preparation for the nationally recognized Child Development Associate credential, should be available for all those who work with young children and families. Both public and private support, through loan forgiveness or scholarships, would help providers gain access to affordable training to meet professional standards. We also envision a coordinated system of training institutions and a cadre of early childhood supervisors who are specifically prepared to work with center-based staff, home visitors or family child care providers serving infants, toddlers, preschoolers, school-aged children, and children with special needs.

States and communities should take steps to improve their training systems and provide adequate compensation. For example:

> Delaware is developing a statewide comprehensive training system for early child care providers based on a career ladder which includes training for all levels of staff and assistance to all types of training programs.
>
> The Mentor Teacher Program in California provides a career track and leadership training to child development teachers; provides community support, recognition and monetary rewards to child development professionals; and allows students access to a high quality, supervised training experience.
>
> In Fairfax County, Virginia, a Quality Assurance Plan provides additional funds for the salaries of some qualified teachers who work in programs that serve young low-income children.

Continuity in these principles of comprehensive support services is critical for families as children reach kindergarten age. Entry into the public school system should provide even more opportunities for communities to pull together efforts to strengthen families and provide effective education.



A VISION OF SCHOOLS THAT SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

All of our children ought to be allowed a stake in the enormous richness of America.
(Kozol, 1991, p.233)

A major theme of the national education goals is that basic skills are no longer sufficient as a performance standard for schools. Rather, our redesign of schools must aim for creative thinking, problem solving, independent learning, and cooperative work as core attributes for students. Thus, the national agenda for advancing "readiness" should include a vision for school policy and practice which responds to two imperatives:

- All children must start on the road to active academic learning with high expectations for success, and, therefore,

- Schools must respond appropriately to the diverse needs, characteristics, and experiences of young children.

The first objective requires that kindergarten and primary grade classrooms exhibit a blend of high expectations, high support, and engaging activities in which students work and learn together in different ways. We base this design on the strong consensus held by early childhood educators and educational researchers on effective approaches to teaching and learning reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies.

The second challenge for schools is to find more effective ways to relate to families and to other agencies and resources in the community so that together they can give children every possible opportunity to succeed.

Our vision for improving elementary schools has five elements:

- Developmentally appropriate practice
- Performance-based assessment
- Parent involvement and family support
- Intensive and sustained staff development
- Comprehensive services to children

To illustrate our vision, we cite examples of local schools from a forthcoming national study of innovative kindergarten and primary grade programs conducted by NASBE (Cummings and Schultz, in press).

1. Developmentally appropriate practice

Kindergarten and primary grade classrooms in high quality schools are organized with learning centers where children can read, work with blocks, explore science, listen to tapes of stories and music, create art, engage in dramatic play, and manipulate mathematics materials. Children do not sit in rows of desks, but rather

move between activities, talking and working in pairs and groups most of the time. The daily schedule includes at least one sizeable block of time for children to select interest centers. Classrooms are supplied with varied, rich materials and projects, but there is a notable absence of textbooks, workbooks, and worksheets. Instead you see large assortments of children's books, writing materials, sets of blocks, abundant art supplies, computers, aquariums, pets, gardens, woodworking materials, and various stages of long-term group projects such as charts, models, or large-scale, detailed drawings.

How are the traditional subjects taught? Through real, hands-on experience, which we know is the most effective teacher for most children. Therefore, to develop mathematical understanding of how numbers and shapes apply to real life, children use pegboards, blocks, number lines, and all types of materials for counting. They use math to keep score in games, to figure out how long a board should be for a carpentry project, to compare weights of stones, or to chart how tall they are getting – building up their conception of numbers through a variety of experiences.

A similarly integrated approach to writing, reading, speaking and listening, and art is used. As an administrator in Holyoke, Massachusetts explains: "We give kids rich, playful, varied language experiences and let them internalize meaning. Reading is a way to get your own answers to your own questions. Writing is a way to communicate with your teacher, family, and your friends."

Many types of writing activities begin in kindergarten. Children write letters to other children or to classes across town or across the country; they keep journals; they work on longer-term projects where several drafts of a piece are produced, edited, illustrated, and bound to create a book; they make large charts that record group discussions or experiments. Reading is pursued as a free choice activity, in individual sessions with the teacher, and as a whole class activity. Teachers use large charts and "Big Books" or puppets and simple props to introduce new stories to the class. Children may curl up with a book in a cozy chair or sprawl out on a rug to share a poem with a friend. Many classrooms also have an "author's chair," where children sign up to read a favorite story to the entire class.

Teachers work actively in these classrooms, but they rarely simply deliver instruction to the entire group of children. Instead, they operate as **architects** of activities and social arrangements, **monitors** of group behavior and individual progress, **coaches and questioners** to extend learning experiences, and **coordinators** of other human and technical resources. We envision teachers working with professional colleagues, computers, family members, community volunteers, and older children as learning resources.

Good schools for young children may also depart from the eggcrate structure of typical elementary schools in which self-contained classrooms and age-based grades minimize and regulate interactions of children and adults. Preferably, children enter ungraded settings where they may stay with the same teacher or team of staff and children for several years. These arrangements allow children to proceed at their own rates of progress and reduce the frequency of high stakes tests and the threat of retention. Another benefit is that teachers have more time to get to know children and families well. However, developmentally appropriate teaching can also take place very successfully in regular classrooms and age-graded schools.

Finally, all staff members and all programs within the school plan and work together. Regular classroom teachers, aides, media and library personnel, and special teachers are regularly involved in the self-assessment, redesign, and implementation process. Special education and compensatory education programs, a major source of supplementary support for students, are shifting away from remedial services and toward enriched, accelerated, and alternative forms of teaching and learning.

Central Park East II Elementary School, New York City

Central Park East II Elementary School is one of 23 alternative schools in Community School District 4 in New York City. There are typically 200 students representing a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Teachers have most children for two years. Subjects are integrated into the classroom activities by using themes. Special enrichment programs such as movement, storytelling, and environmental studies are an integral part of the curriculum. Children are encouraged to express themselves verbally and to share and problem solve together. Staff participate in weekly staff meetings, curriculum sharing sessions, planning sessions, conferences with the director, special workshops on family issues, and staff retreats. Parents volunteer in the choral music, band, and Spanish programs. Families also participate in school picnics, a festival of the arts, potluck suppers, concerts, and monthly breakfasts for parents.

2. Performance-based assessment

Good schools for young children move away from reliance on standardized achievement tests of basic skills, as well as policies of tracking or retaining children. They move toward a philosophy of assessment that is continuous, based on children's performance, and directed by the teacher. As a teacher in Maine notes, "We're shifting from subjective graders to objective recorders, focusing on what the children know and which strategies they are using."

Children's progress is assessed daily through teacher observations, checklists and portfolios containing samples of children's work. These methods support developmentally appropriate instruction, and are almost mandatory strategies when children move between different activities and learn at different levels on various

tasks. As children work during free choice or center time for example, teachers circulate to assist children. They also make notes on clipboards, checklists, charts or gummed labels to keep track of what children do and the quality of their performance. For example, standard checklists for oral reading might help teachers note the material and level of difficulty, words children have trouble pronouncing, strategies they use to deal with a word they don't understand, overall fluency, and a host of other elements. As a teacher in South Brunswick, New Jersey, says:

> The real value of checklists is when they get into your brain. We've learned how to organize all the information we have in our heads about children. And as we've learned to understand the normal sequence of learning in different areas, it's easier to keep track of kids' work and to give parents and administrators evidence of their progress.

Portfolios are an evolving system – and something many families have done informally for years. They include samples of children's writing and artwork, tapes of oral reading, anecdotes written by the teacher, lists of books read, notes on problem-solving strategies in mathematics, photographs of projects as they evolve and many other records of children's efforts to make sense of the world around them.

These changes in assessment and instruction are integrally linked. As classrooms move toward richer, more engaging environments, teachers need better ways to capture children's work and behavior. Assessment helps teachers understand children's progress, how their minds work, and how to extend and enrich their learning. Credible assessment is also crucial to assure families and policymakers that teachers will retain strong responsibility for student progress in the midst of these less traditional classroom activities.

3. Parent involvement and family support

Schools should work on the assumption that every parent can help their child learn and that schools can help this to happen.
Heather Weiss

We envision schools where families are regarded as partners in the educational process – and as valued clients and customers of the enterprise. Parents are encouraged to help engage children in learning, reading and other activies at home. In addition, it means families are immersed in the ongoing life of the school.

Parents as volunteers. Good schools for young children welcome family members to observe and work with children in classrooms – going well beyond a stance in which volunteer efforts are confined to fundraising efforts. Guidance about positive ways to promote learning is provided. One important benefit of parents working in classrooms is to help connect activities with the language and culture of the home and community.

- A mother in South Brunswick, New Jersey, who works as a professional dance teacher, helps some first grade children rehearse for an upcoming performance.

- In Iowa City, Iowa, a parent sits on a bench in a quiet hallway as a first grader reads to her and they discuss a story together. Down the hall a small room serves as a publishing center, staffed by volunteers who have been trained to make books out of writings composed, edited, and illustrated by students.

■ In Franklin County, Mississippi, a father arrives at school with his back hoe to help move top soil for children's gardens.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES. Developmentally appropriate schools use a variety of ways to communicate with parents about school programs and their children's progress. They also solicit parents' contributions, listen to their concerns and compliments, and seek information that enables them to work more closely on each child's behalf:

■ In Toledo, Oregon, primary teachers make home visits to each of their students in the early fall, to get to know parents and families better.

■ Redwood City, California, surveys parents each year, asking them to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the classroom program and to comment on their children's progress.

EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR PARENTS. We envision increased efforts by schools to support parents and families:

■ At Central Park East II in New York City, four staff members are trained by a family therapist to conduct family conferences with parents, children, and school staff to generate alternatives and develop plans for resolving problems which show up in children's behavior or emotional development.

■ In Nome, Alaska, bilingual teachers serve as "Aunties" to help children and families newly arrived from outlying villages to adjust to a school of 450 children and to life in the "big city."

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), Duluth, Minnesota

ECFE aims to strengthen families by helping parents meet the developmental needs of their children, birth through age 5. Operated through the public schools, ECFE provides information, peer support, and a variety of other services. Their Parent/Infant Program offers a series of classes to first-time parents on-site at two local hospitals. Family School is an intensive 14-week preventive program of home visiting and group meetings for parents faced with multiple sources of stress. ECFE also brings services to a housing project, neighborhood drop-in centers, prisons, and facilities for children with special needs. The program has a pilot initiative to improve the transition of young children into kindergarten that links school staff with parents of 4-year-old children. ECFE exchanges referrals with health, social service, specific education, and counseling programs in order to help families obtain needed services. (Adapted from Weiss, *et. al.*, in press.)

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN DECISIONMAKING. We believe parents should be empowered to make decisions in the schools their children attend:

- Scarborough, Maine, began its multi-aged primary program so families could choose this option or a graded program. After 3 years, enrollment is about even between graded and ungraded classrooms.

- Chicago's Frances Rocha Early Learning Center is part of that city's restructuring process. School site councils of parents, teachers, and community members participate in selecting the principal, reviewing budgets, and contributing to curriculum decisions.

- Holyoke's City-Wide Parent Planning Council has exerted strong influence in lobbying for increased preschool funding and improved school facilities. It has raised questions at the state level regarding policies on accountability and bilingual education.

4. Intensive and sustained staff development

We envision schools in which, in the words of one administrator, "veteran, 'basal-addicted' teachers can change their work with children and get turned on by the process." Staff combine intense study of new knowledge and skills, time to practice and work through problems with peers, and time to reflect and absorb new routines (Loucks-Horsley, *et. al.*, 1987). The sobering news is that substantial support is needed in the process. Schools in Kansas and Chicago employed a part-time university faculty staff developer for 1 to 2 years to work with a group of 10 to 15 teachers.

Why do staff need such intensive support?

- To deal with shifts in concepts, values, and beliefs which undergird teaching practice. Powerful ideas about what children are capable of, what teachers' responsibilities are, and the nature of knowledge and learning are at the heart of teaching methods.

- To handle anxiety about change in an important area of life. This range and depth of change inevitably raises the possibility of failure and questions about past practices in which commitment and energy were invested.

- To deal with the substantial and complex task of discarding and rebuilding routines and classroom practices. For example, a shift from working alone in self-contained classrooms to daily interaction with colleagues in planning and practice can create competition and tension, and requires new skills.

However, these costs and efforts have multiple rewards. Teachers are invigorated and rejuvenated as professionals. They are stimulated and supported by colleagues. Outside resource people develop independent, autonomous groups of teachers, capable of supporting each other and further refining their programs on their own. Most importantly, children's successes spur them on to active learning. More children can find a match with their interests and their styles of learning.

Support for this long-term teacher development process requires leadership, ingenuity and persistent support from school administrators. Administrators serve as a buffer between teachers, parents, and the community and they encourage, validate, and subtly pressure teachers in the uncertain process of change to more effective practices. For example, in Holyoke, Massachusetts, Chapter 1 resources were used to create an Office for Parent Involvement and to employ specialists to work with groups of parents in creating materials for classroom teachers. Administrators also transformed school reading specialists from tutors to trainers in whole language methods, textbook funds paid for more developmentally appropriate materials, and state school improvement grants were directed towards staff development for primary teachers.

5. Comprehensive services for children

Many schools are supporting the non-academic needs of young children and families. Many states sponsor part-day preschool programs for at-risk and special needs children. Others offer family support and education strategies such as Missouri's Parents As Teachers Program and Minnesota's Early Childhood Family Education Program. Some schools are developing even more substantial strategies to address the physical and social needs of students and families.

Wallbridge Caring Communities Program
St. Louis, Missouri

The Caring Communities Program is a pilot program, jointly funded by the State Departments of Education, Mental Health, Social Services and Health, and the Danforth Foundation to demonstrate service coordination at the local level. The Program uses elementary schools as a hub for a network of local agencies that provide coordinated services to families. The Wallbridge Elementary School now houses twenty-two full- and part-time project staff to provide a range of services including school-age child care, parenting (through Parents as Teachers), after-school tutoring, substance abuse treatment, cultural awareness , and case management. As the Project Director describes it, theirs is an effort to recreate a village environment for children and families. They work to build community, link families to existing services, and create both informal and formal supports for families.

CHAPTER V

MAKING IT HAPPEN: 4 STEPS TO BUILDING A CARING COMMUNITY

We need to reinvent the role government plays in supporting young children. Two key priorities are showing the public that their money is being invested in the future, and helping parents to be successful. We need to put government at the service of parents who are struggling to succeed regardless of their income.
Governor Bill Clinton

It is time for a new national commitment and a new strategy to support young children and their families. The school readiness goal highlights the public benefits of healthy early childhood development. Unfortunately, we lack a coherent system to achieve the goal:

- Public support for young children is far more limited than for older children.

- Health services, public education, child care, preschool and family support programs are funded, regulated and managed by a maze of public and private agencies.

- Success in reaching school readiness depends on the personal values and actions of families and the efforts of thousands of teachers, physicians and family service workers.

We are impressed with the initial debate and energies mobilized by the national education goals. But the hard and costly work of achieving these objectives has just begun. Only a campaign which draws on leadership from government, private and voluntary organizations, and families can bring about the kinds of caring communities that hold promise for America's future. Creating caring communities depends on four areas of action:

Local leadership and planning to develop public commitment and strategies to improve support for young children and families in early childhood programs and schools.

Responsive federal policies and resources in order to implement local plans. These federal policies must allow more local decisionmaking to improve the effectiveness of local early childhood programs and schools. Federal funds can help overcome extreme variations in community resources and thus offer more equal opportunity for all families and children.

State government leadership to pull together federal and state mandates and funds to create more coherent and flexible local service systems. State policy and management are critical to improving local programs and schools and to developing an effective early childhood workforce.

Private sector and voluntary agency commitment to complement public early childhood programs and to build additional sources of support for families.

STEP 1 - COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PLANNING

Our Task Force recommendations for community initiatives focus on practical steps to build public awareness and create a consensus for action:

Create an Early Childhood Leadership Forum

This Leadership Forum would include political and business leaders, voluntary agency representatives, public school staff members, parents, health care providers and early childhood and family support service workers. This group makes a sustained commitment to lead planning and action, and begins with a comprehensive assessment of the status of children and families.

Conduct a community audit of conditions for child and family development

The Leadership Forum commissions or conducts a comprehensive review of school readiness issues, needs and opportunities. The Forum then creates a picture of community strengths and assets in programs and conditions, as well as key problems and service gaps. The audit process includes varied opportunities for public input and debate and culminates in a major report designed to influence public policy and voluntary commitments. We suggest the following elements for the Community Audit:

1. Gather data on the numbers, geographic distribution, and basic conditions of young children in terms of income status, race and ethnicity, family composition, health, and exposure to environmental risks. What trends are observable in these areas in recent years?

2. Gather data on the quality and accessibility of essential services for children, prenatal through age 8, in all income/neighborhood/cultural groups:

- What help is available for adolescent mothers, recent immigrants or homeless families?
- How are environmental risks such as lead poisoning addressed?
- Do working parents have access to a choice of affordable, quality early childhood programs?
- How widespread are screening and public education systems to identify children with special needs or who are victims of child abuse?
- What types of information and social suppport are available to parents, including those who stay at home with their children? What assistance is available for locating and evaluating child care options?
- How well do professional agencies work with families? For example, how much time and paperwork is needed for low-income parents to establish eligibility for core health, family support and early childhood services? How do different early childhood programs cooperate with each other?

3. Interview parents, staff, program directors, school principals, and kindergarten and primary teachers to pinpoint their most crucial problems and ask what services would meet their needs.

4. Survey staff credentials, compensation, career options, turnover and morale in all types of early childhood programs.

5. Determine what funds are used for early childhood services and how funding patterns relate to family needs.

6. Study retention rates, testing, promotion, and school and teaching practices in the school system.

Establish clear goals and indicators for school readiness and short-term achievable strategies for improvement

The audit process will reveal different problems and opportunities in each community. In some areas with a history of strong early childhood programs, considerable potential may exist to reorganize and redeploy public funds. The Leadership Forum can also promote collaboration among early childhood providers in areas such as recruitment, staff development, and family needs assessments. In other communities, the assessment may reveal serious problems which require new resources. As an initial action, we recommend that the Leadership Forum create a concise Early Childhood Report Card, framed around a few specific, measureable goals to track in the community. We also recommend that the Forum create an ongoing mechanism to monitor the implementation of its recommendations.

STEP 2 - IMPROVED FEDERAL POLICIES AND INVESTMENT

Expanded public leadership is essential to help communities develop innovative responses to the first national education goal. This is an opportune time for new leadership from the federal level:

- Recent federal child care legislation, funding increases for Head Start and new federal mandates to serve young children with disabilities are providing vital services in states and communities.

- The Department of Education's America 2000 Initiative stimulates states and communities to make formal commitments to adopt the national education goals.

- Collaboration between the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, as well as between Head Start and the Chapter I program, are encouraging developments.

Our recommendations for federal action are based on two key objectives. The first is to **empower communities** to create more integrated and comprehensive early childhood and family support services. The second is to **increase resources to communities** in order to improve basic health care and family support systems and to support high quality early childhood programs. We recognize a tension between these two aims. In the near term, we recommend expanding many existing federal categorical programs. However, we also recommend restructuring our federal early childhood initiatives to create a more coherent and flexible system of funding for community-based initiatives.

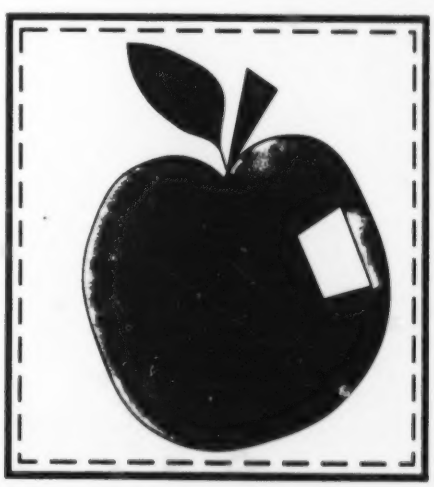
Expand Head Start and child care services

We are encouraged by the multiple efforts of different levels of government and private agencies to support early childhood programs for children from low-income families. Expansion of Head Start and child care at the federal level is joined with state-funded prekindergarten programs in more than 30 states. A wide range of local contributions are made to similar programs.

Head Start represents one of the nation's most significant strides to address young children's school readiness. Among its strengths are detailed standards to assure high quality; comprehensive services; a strong tradition of substantial parent involvement; and a philosophy of local community planning and management. Despite recent progress to expand and improve the program, it still remains underfunded. The Task Force recommends expanded funding of Head Start as follows:

- Provide access for all income-eligible 3- to 5-year-olds to high quality Head Start programs.
- Allow local programs to expand services to pregnant women and children from birth to age 3.
- Fund full-day and full-year services as needed by families.
- Improve the quality of programs through additional family support staff and services, increased staff compensation and fringe benefits linked to improved training and competence, and allowances to purchase or construct facilities. Provide additional staff time for networking with the other community agencies and to help families receive needed services from other organizations.
- Adjust income eligibility guidelines to levels consistent with other federal family support and early childhood programs. This would allow participation by more "over-income" children in working families and children with special needs.

Along with increases in Head Start, we recommend additional public investment in full-day early childhood services for low-income children not eligible for Head Start. Funds should enable existing services to become more comprehensive, increase affordability, and integrate children with special needs.



Improve access to health services

The Task Force recommends federal leadership to ensure that all families with young children have access to appropriate health services. We recommend:

- Government and employer collaboration to develop a universal system of health insurance coverage for pregnant women and children that includes basic care, as well as provisions to contain costs and to improve quality.

- Expanded programs that reach underserved populations, including the National Health Service Corps, Community and Migrant Health Centers, the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant and the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

- Broadened federal commitments to ensure that all children are fully immunized by providing funds to purchase recommended vaccines, to develop a more efficient system to track children's immunization status, and to strengthen child care licensing standards to assure immunization of all children in programs.

- Increased support for systematic screening of young children to identify and refer children for special education and other services.

- Promotion of a consistent medical home (one-stop shopping) by sharing models and techniques for service integration and coordination with communities.

Expand family support

Many parents struggle to provide nurturing environments for their children, yet lack social and emotional supports to help them reach this goal. Clearly the key to readiness in children is a strong and supportive family. Although the Task Force believes that ensuring family support is a responsibility shared by state and local governments, we recommend that the federal government provide leadership by:

- Passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act to establish the right to unpaid leave for the birth, adoption or illness of a child, spouse or elderly parent, or the employee's own illness; guaranteeing employees the same or equivalent position when they return to work; and continuing health benefits during the leave period.

- Expanded funding and incentives for community family support programs.

- Increased incentives for families and citizens to be involved in early childhood programs and the public schools as volunteers, mentors and advisors.

Improve and expand Chapter 1, support for special education, and model early childhood programs in public schools

The big challenge for national education policy is how to move from a small set of outstanding examples of good schools to broad implementation of these models.

- Continue to examine and improve policies in the Department of Education's major programs that influence local school practice, such as Chapter 1 and P.L. 99-457. Both of these programs influence staffing patterns; testing, tracking and grouping of students; and interactions with parents. New provisions of the Chapter 1 program offer more encouragement for school-wide projects, renewed emphasis on parental involvement, and increased concern for improving students' basic and "higher order" skills. We urge continued national leadership to direct teaching, testing and grouping practices toward developmentally appropriate principles. We recommend as priorities the development of alternatives to pull-out programs and improving access and coordination of all federal resources for early childhood programs (NAECSSDE, 1991).

- Increase federal support to enable states to provide early intervention to children with special needs from birth through age 5, through a variety of types of early childhood programs.

- Ensure that the 535 model New American Schools in the Department of Education's America 2000 Initiative provide developmentally appropriate classes and comprehensive services for children in the early years. We further recommend creating a strategy to transfer the lessons of these models to other schools and communities.

Implement policies that empower communities to create more integrated, quality and comprehensive early childhood services

Many early childhood programs are designed in detail at the federal and state level and leave little flexibility to accomodate community and neighborhood priorities. Multiple categorical programs complicate the work of local providers and local officials charged with improving an overall system of supports for young children and families.

We recommend federal leadership to convene representatives of state and local agencies, providers and consumer organizations to review the current structure, funding guidelines, and regulations of federal programs, and to recommend improvements in areas such as:

- Incentives for collaboration in local planning and needs assessment.

- Joint application and eligibility provisions.

- Greater consistency in standards for quality.

- Greater flexibility in use of funds to respond to community priorities.

We also recommend stronger federal leadership in helping states and communities to improve the quality and effectiveness of early childhood programs through the following actions:

- Establish a national clearinghouse and networking system to identify and promote exemplary state and local approaches to key problems in early childhood services.

- Provide incentives and technical assistance to states to improve their training and certification policies and to support increased compensation and recognition of early childhood providers.

- Expand loan forgiveness programs and scholarship funds for early childhood staff training.

STEP 3 - IMPROVED STATE POLICIES AND INVESTMENT

Many states have developed innovative early childhood and family support initiatives. States set standards for program quality, influence career development and training systems, and coordinate multiple federal programs and funding streams.

Plan for and invest in community-based, high quality, comprehensive early childhood and family support programs

We recommend that states take the following steps to expand high quality services:

- Review policies to ensure communities have flexibility in providing comprehensive services that meet local needs.

- Invest additional funds in comprehensive services (based on the Head Start model) that would allow full-day services to children from birth through age 5, adequate family support, and linkages to health services.

- Invest additional state dollars to help integrate special needs children into community child care programs.

- Move toward a single set of high standards for all early childhood programs, similar in scope to the Head Start performance standards and the NAEYC accreditation standards. Provide incentives, such as adequate reimbursement rates, to allow all forms of programs to meet those goals.

- Develop a plan to enhance staff quality and career development in all types of early childhood programs and agencies. Stimulate joint staff development opportunities and linkages between inservice programs and credentials obtained in higher education institutions. Develop quality assurance funds to finance training and increased compensation, including fringe benefits for staff members. Create ways to recognize outstanding service and effectiveness by teachers and other staff, such as awards or sabbaticals.

- Initiate strategies to recruit and orient families, senior citizens and other volunteers in all programs.

- Fund a state-wide, locally-based child care resource and referral system to provide parents with information on child care options and to enhance private sector involvement in early childhood programs.

Expand the state commitment to health services

We recommend that states consider the following actions to improve access to health services:

- Extend Medicaid coverage to all pregnant women and infants with incomes below 185% of poverty. Increase the supply of providers through improved reimbursement and an adequate benefits package.

- Contribute to community health centers and local maternal and child health programs.

- Provide incentives for physicians and other health professionals to practice in medically underserved areas.

- Support childhood immunization activities, pay for personnel to administer vaccines, and improve ways to identify and serve culturally isolated families.

- Supplement federal WIC dollars.

- Promote a one-stop-shopping approach to health services, as outlined by the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality (1991).

Improve policies and expand support for quality early childhood services in public schools

We recommend that states revamp education policies related to kindergarten and early elementary practices, including teacher certification, testing and retention guidelines, textbook and materials selection, staff development, funds for dissemination and innovations, compensatory and special education. Consistent supports and mandates outlined here would encourage developmentally appropriate teaching practices for all young children. These would include:

- A curriculum framework for the primary grades that makes teaching for understanding and problem-solving through active, concrete, and social activities a priority.

- An assessment system to broadly evaluate children's academic progress (such as abilities to understand, compare and interpret written text; to write about experiences; to make observations about nature and other people; to work with other children) through a variety of measures. The primary function of the system is to direct resources and assistance to schools, teachers and children who are not making successful progress. Local schools and districts should receive assistance and incentives to develop alternatives to retaining young children.

- A teacher preparation, certification, and assessment system that supports developmentally appropriate pedagogy; and training for school administrators on how to support and assess high quality primary grade teaching.

■ Expanded staff development for teachers of young children, including incentives for collaborative training systems for public school and all early childhood personnel; support systems to identify and disseminate successful strategies for instruction and program organizations in areas such as student assessment, multicultural education, and ungraded primary programs; resources provided for a variety of instructional materials and supplies in addition to textbooks and workbooks.

■ Policies to encourage active involvement of families in local schools as volunteers, decision makers and partners in educational activities at home and in the community.

■ State leadership to encourage local collaboration among public education and other early childhood and family-service organizations.

STEP 4 - INITIATIVES BY BUSINESS AND VOLUNTARY AGENCIES

The synthesis for the 1990s must be that although government has a role at all levels, even with the full participation of state and local government it cannot do the job by itself. These problems will not be solved without the participation of all of us, as individuals and as institutions of which we are a part – our churches, our companies, our unions, the United Way. And the people who need help have an obligation too – to take responsibility for themselves to make the maximum use of the help to achieve self-sufficiency.
(Edelman & Radin, 1991, p. 54)

Communities are defined and supported by businesses, churches, libraries, YMCAs and YWCAs and other neighborhood organizations, as well as schools and governments. Community efforts to promote school readiness must draw on the energies and resources of all community institutions. Government programs and families can be bolstered by private and voluntary efforts.

Reports by the Business Roundtable, National Alliance of Business (1991), and the Committee for Economic Development (1991) emphasize how business leaders help place education, including early childhood development, high on the public agenda. These national efforts need to be emulated through local commitments by small businesses and Chambers of Commerce as well as large corporations. Employers can make a tremendous difference in their stance toward employees who are parents by linking them with quality child care, allowing time off to care for sick children or to volunteer in schools and early childhood programs, and by supporting leave for parents during the crucial early months of babies' lives.

Influence public policy

Business leaders can lobby and develop media and public education campaigns to support legislation and funding to increase the quality of early childhood programs and staff.

Support family life and parent involvement

Employers can bolster improvements in early childhood programs and schools through establishing:

- Parental leave.
- Release time or flextime to locate early childhood services, to help children adjust to a new program, to care for sick children or to visit and volunteer in programs.
- Flexible work schedules.
- Family education and support groups.
- Adequate fringe benefits, such as health care and assistance in paying for child care.

Build partnerships with early childhood programs and schools

Businesses can offer tangible help in areas such as these:

- Accounting systems to track and allocate funds from a variety of sources and to meet differing regulations.
- Developing data bases to track children and the services they receive.
- Donating unused space, facilities and utilities.
- Providing leadership and management training.
- Recruiting employees to serve in voluntary organizations.

CONCLUSION

If we are to achieve our first education goal – that American children will start school ready to learn – we must draw upon the strengths of our best public programs, our most effective private investments and our most dedicated people. Our youngest and most precious resources depend on us to ensure their health and well-being. Government, private institutions, families – all must work together to build caring communities that promote young children's development.

Families are strong when they have the abilities and confidence to nurture their children. Most families are well-prepared for the task of childrearing. For other families, a caring community offers the best hope that their children will thrive. Finally, a caring community should support **personal commitment** to young children and families. A caring community relies on personal energy along with good early childhood programs and schools to build environments where children can learn and families can flourish.

Parents are encouraged to:

- Spend consistent time with their children talking, playing, reading or working together.
- Help their children to feel capable and valued.
- Monitor children's activities, particularly their television viewing.
- Protect and promote their own health and the health of their children.
- Build relationships with other parents to share their experiences, questions, worries and successes in the challenging job of rearing young children. Support each other in solving problems and taking action on their concerns with other organizations and institutions.
- Visit, observe and work as volunteers in early childhood programs and schools.

Relatives, neighbors and friends of young children are urged to:

- Provide moral support and encouragement to families.
- Serve as role models for parents and children.
- Volunteer to work with children and families in early childhood and family support programs.
- Help young families create a network of social supports in their community.
- Advocate improved and expanded health, family support and early childhood services.

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BACKGROUND ON TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Bill Clinton is serving his fifth term as Governor of Arkansas. He has worked to improve education and increase economic development and employment in Arkansas. As former Chair of the National Governors' Association and the Education Commission of the States, he provided national leadership on education reform and welfare reform initiatives. In 1989, Governor Clinton was co-chair of NGA's Task Force on Education and played a major role in the President's Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, and in drafting the national education goals that were announced by the President in his 1990 State of the Union Address.

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Betty Castor began her service as Florida's elected Commissioner of Education in January, 1987. She has also served as a member of the State Senate and as Chair of the Senate Education Committee. As Commissioner, she frequently returns to her first role in public education by teaching in Florida's schools. Under her leadership, Florida is recognized for innovations in early childhood education, business partnerships, educational technology, and school volunteer programs.

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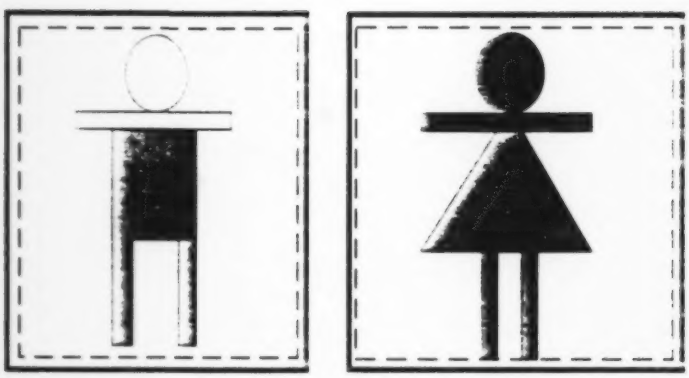

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